

SUE WATERMAN

## Collecting the Nineteenth Century

*THERE WERE NINE BLACK BOXES that opened from the top, all of them crammed with paper, brown or yellowed, crumbling sometimes, edges ragged from their long confinement. The project was to make sense of them, to put them in order, to process them, as if they would enter something and come out on the other side transformed. There was a computer and software for the data entry; there was space on empty bookshelves to begin the sorting; there were piles and piles of folders to hold the papers; and pencils, a printer, and more boxes, new Hollinger boxes, in which to place the new folders as each was labeled with the name of the particular piece of paper it held. More than thirteen hundred pieces in individual folders, more than six months of work in the "cage" on Deck B of the Library of Congress, more than ten years of obsession with a project that should have ended with the internship. You walk away, the job is done, the paper remains behind.*

*It is nearly invisible, the link that threads its way from the beginning of the project, through its completion, into its expansion as more collections were discovered, a link that persists even now as I once again try to make sense of all those objects. The link in fact existed before I ever set eyes on those boxes. At first perhaps it was merely serendipity, being chosen for the project over other applicants. But the fact is, I was chosen for one reason—the French language; I spoke French. So the wheels were set in motion. And when, several years later, the project was again taken up, expanded, and revised, it was really as a pretext. The goal was a research grant; the prize was Paris.*

*One of my most prized possessions is the French language itself. Like a room where you can go and close the door, a place where you wear strange and wonderful clothes, a city you inhabit that contains the memories of who you never were. Behind it all was the simple desire to get back to Paris.*

*What does it mean to be haunted by a place? Is it any different from being haunted by a particular class of objects? I have made of Paris a collection for nearly thirty years; a year here, a fortnight there, and in-between, stays of three, four, five days. A collection of days spent, moments lived, voyages out. And each one engenders a desire to return; as in any collection, each object acquired provides only temporary, incomplete satisfaction, engendering the desire for the next object, and then the next, and the next. The four collections so meticulously studied and pursued have provided the means for building my own singular, spectral collection.*

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**ABSTRACT** The linking of a series of nineteenth-century collections of a prominent Belgian family reveals more than just the outlines of the cultures of nineteenth-century collecting. The bonds of scientific confraternity, family, and love are perhaps not as strong as those of time and memory, and the nature of the archive may be, at times, both fluid and uncertain. / **REPRESENTATIONS** 90. Spring 2005 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 98-128. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at [www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm](http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm).

At first glance, their collections are disparate, idiosyncratic, unrelated, and sometimes they are not even collections, properly speaking. The fact that the collectors themselves are related, three successive generations of nineteenth-century Belgian nobility, is enough to invite interest in their activities, but the blood relationship may indeed be a tenuous thread tying these collections together. The oldest one, rocks, is dispersed and lost. Nothing remains save a single piece of paper in an archive in Brussels, “*Explication du meuble ou sont les collections.*” The second, extensive and carefully preserved, consists of animal, bird, and insect specimens reverently stored in a natural history museum, also in Brussels. The third, photographs, when formed was not even a collection in any material sense of the word but now exists as one, so properly named *le fonds Selys Longchamps*, in the Museum of Photography in Charleroi. And the last, paper pamphlets, against all odds, was collected, saved, and preserved, passed down somehow from person to person until purchased by the Library of Congress in Washington, where it now is known as the “Archive of French Publishing Prospectuses.” Four very different collections, amassed by grandfather, father, and two sons, moving from rocks (lost) at the beginning of the century, to paper (carefully preserved) at century’s end. Although of vastly different character, animal and mineral, solid and paper, text and image, organic and inorganic, they are nonetheless together emblematic of collecting in the nineteenth century. On another level, though, they may be only a *pretext*, in a very literal sense, but they will do, this much I know at the outset; they will do quite nicely, as a way in, as the engine driving my own collecting activity.



## Rocks

*There is much to be said on the ordering of the Archive.  
There is much to be said on the nature of the Archive itself.*

*At a university two hundred miles from home there is an odd, obviously nineteenth-century building, on a campus known for its eighteenth-century architecture. Glancing up, I notice familiar names grinning down from high above. Lyell, Owen, Humboldt, Darwin, Cuvier, Werner, Dana, Agassiz. If this were a Greek temple, it would be a frieze; if a Gothic cathedral, a gallery, but in this kind of building the names are on a stringcourse, and there are also great stone heads under the names on the corners of the building. A rhinoceros under Lyell, a walrus under Huxley, a camel under Hall, a buffalo under Cuvier, a boar under Linnaeus. And again, above these names, four stories up on the very top corners of the building, a lion, a wolf, an elephant, an ape, a zebra. Walking around to the front of the building, I look up and read in marble over the main door:*

LEWIS BROOKS

HALL OF

NATURAL SCIENCE

*The place itself, this space of building, trees, lawn, has suddenly become an archive, as when someone (was it William Smith?) looked at a landscape he had known his whole life and suddenly saw the layers of time spread out before him, in rocks and upheavals of the soil. This is a building that, while it looks much like the other brick buildings on campus, is an artifact of the time that has slowly come to inhabit me. It may be the department of anthropology now, but it once was The Museum.*

*The choice and placement of the names remains a bit of a mystery, an enigma. Why is Cuvier so prominent? Why is Darwin sidelined? The American names on the south wall, Rogers, Dana, Agassiz (an adopted American), Audubon, Gray, and Hall, make sense in a way. But opposite them on the north wall, an odd mixture of Europeans: Huxley, St.-Hilaire, Darwin, Owen, De Candolle, and Lyell. The whole effect is an odd cacophony of scientific voices. Old World and New, opponents and defenders of evolution, geologist next to zoologist, botanist next to paleontologist, two Germans together on the back wall and two names from the Ancient world, Aristotle and Pliny, centered east and west. And even more odd, the absence of one of the greatest names in natural history, Buffon, although his name appears on the original architect's plans. He was removed—to make way for whom? In some uncanny way, the bricks and granite and marble of this edifice tell a story, narrate the natural history of the nineteenth century, with all its controversies, its debates, its theories and countertheories, and its gradual diffusion.*

*It was the names and then the animal heads that drew my eye to it, and, once drawn, I*

*was bewitched by the bricks and the stone. A Museum here, where one would not expect to find such a thing, or, not a Museum now, but a relic of one, the shell of what once was a massive hall of natural history. It survived attempts at demolition but it was eventually emptied, seventy years after its grand opening, when the space it occupied had become more valuable than what was in it, emptied of the twenty-five thousand specimens, which were dispersed or put into storage, emptied of the dinosaur and the woolly mammoth smashed into dust and carted away. What was left were the names and the heads, the traces in granite and marble of what the building had once been, a hall of natural history, a collection, a Museum.*

**Jean-Julien.** *You can only ever go home again.* The map he kept of his travels proves this, forty-five kilometers a day on foot over the course of seventy-one years; the paths he took, over the Alps to Italy, through Poland and Hungary, to Russia, to Norway, and England, south to the Pyrenees, all lead inexorably back to Halloy. Halloy, a blackened spot at the center of the map, the alpha and omega of his many travels, so that the map, pasted into the back of one of the books from his great library, resembles at a glance a large spider, with legs reaching out across Europe, its great body centered on the province of Namur, in south-central Belgium, the château d'Halloy, home, the place to which he returned, time and time again.

He is known for another map, one that represented the territory he knew best, the terrain he traversed countless times in the course of his long life, the north of France, the space between home and Paris.

Sketch of a geological map of France, the Pays-Bas, and some other neighbouring countries / by J.-J. d'Omalus d'Halloy from materials collected conjointly with Baron Coquebert de Montbret. 35 × 36 cm, folded to 20 × 10 cm, hand col. London: W. Philips, 1824.

It was the first of its kind, in 1813 a fully colored geological map of Europe, predating Smith's more famous map of England by two years. But for reasons he could not control, its publication was delayed for nine years; not until 1822 was it published in Paris, then widely translated. The culmination of his early years, of study in Paris at the *Muséum*, and of traveling on foot throughout western Europe, observing and carefully describing rocks and soils and strata and formations, the map was his masterpiece, briefly bringing him fame and honors, the fame fading over the course of a century that saw geology grow from a gentleman's leisurely pursuit into a true science, the honors all but forgotten in the shadow of the greater names that followed: De Beaumont and Dumont in his own Belgium, Lyell, Murchison, Chambers, Sedgwick, Darwin and many others in England, Cuvier in France, Agassiz in the United States.

Geology was a brand new science at the outset of the nineteenth-century, the word coined a mere twenty-two years before 1800. As a science, its object was the study, description, mapping, and naming of the earth's surface, all contributing to



a grand narrative that would explain the fossils, the layers of rocks, the sequence and inclination of strata, and the changes that had occurred over vast amounts of time. Or as Buffon had prescribed in 1778, contemporaneously with the appearance of the word *geology*, the task was to

fouiller les archives du monde, tirer des entrailles de la terre les vieux monuments, recueillir leurs débris, et rassembler en un corps de preuves tous les indices des changements physiques qui peuvent nous faire remonter aux différents âges de la nature.<sup>1</sup>

Excavate, remove, collect, and reassemble the physical evidence itself, the rocks and fossils, the *documents* of the archive that was the earth itself.

It has been called the Golden Age of Geology, or the period of the Great Masters of Geology, the first decades of the nineteenth century, and his name registers a mention in early accounts of the period but has nearly faded from more recent ones.<sup>2</sup> Known in Belgium as the Father of Geology and throughout the nineteenth century as one of its giants, he has all but disappeared from historical accounts of geology's heyday, the heady years of the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the brilliant work he accomplished, from his arrival in Paris in 1804 to his departure for Halloy in 1814, work that earned him the respect of great men such as Cuvier and Brongniart whom he had known as his teachers at the *Muséum*, he became separated from the main current of geological activity, adrift in the countryside of Halloy where he took an administrative post in the local government until 1830,



while the great currents of geological debate seemingly passed over him. He always modestly acknowledged the effect of his long estrangement from the field during those years and the consequent erosion of his stature as a geologist in his later writings. Upon the publication, at last, of his geological map, in the *Annales des Mines* (1822), he apologizes:

This memoir was composed at the end of 1813; but the author, called for some time to duties which did not permit him to occupy himself with natural sciences, has been obliged to delay its publication until the present time; but he hopes that this circumstance will plead his excuse for not placing his work on a level with the progress that geology has made within the last ten years.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever his reputation may be, whatever it was during his lifetime, he is remembered for several small points: he named the Cretaceous period of geological history; he drew the first real geological map of Europe; he formulated the principle that in a basin, the inclined layers are always older than the horizontal ones. All results of his travels, on foot, throughout Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, and England, travels that in time led back to the château of Halloy. He was known as a *stratigraphe*, a reader of strata, and it was the nature of his reading material to lead him on long treks, the text being the earth itself, its rocks, its formations, its own travels through deep time.

That there were layers of time had been known since Nicholas Steno; the lower layers were older, the upper ones younger. Successive strata of rocks had been laid down, one on top of another, forming a stack. This configuration would be mirrored in his cabinet of specimens, a drawer or a shelf for each layer of time. He had collected small pieces of formations, picked up myriad samples from the terrains, and brought them home to his library, where he had placed a cabinet to hold his bits of time.

It held more than just rocks. A portion was dedicated to his zoological specimens, such as they were: petrified. A drawer too for instruments and one for writing utensils, but mostly the cabinet held rocks, from Russia, from Scandinavia, from Italy, and from England; from France, Hungary and Greece. Long since dispersed, the lot of them, the cabinet too, lost and forgotten. What remains, a single sheet of paper. There is no way to tell how large the cabinet was, or how many specimens it once held. It seems to have contained twenty shelves, or drawers (even this is unclear from his inventory), each one divided in two, so that there were forty compartments in all. One could surmise however that it resembled others whose images we have in books: a tall wooden wardrobe with shallow but wide drawers that pulled out several feet and held scores of small storage bins (similar to a printer's case); a rock, carefully labeled, in each. The rocks were not, of course, placed there haphazardly, for the layers from which they had been removed (and to which perhaps they eventually returned) existed in a system, and it was this system that was brought indoors to inhabit the cabinet, placed amongst the books, in the heart of the great library. A metonymic system, the world in a box.





There was nothing unusual about the cabinet. It contained the most ordinary of rocks, not the splendid mineral specimens collected in previous centuries, and its purpose was not to impress or evoke wonder. Its purpose was to incarnate, in miniature, the grand spectacle Jean-Julien explored outside the walls of the library that held it. He brought it all inside and there arranged and labeled and stored the pieces of the puzzle so that it all somehow seemed, at last, possessable.

At what point did his collections disappear? His last trip in February 1874, days after his ninety-first birthday, was a solitary excursion to the outskirts of Brussels to study limestone deposits on the river Senne. Alone, on a cold day, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, but was lucid long enough to give his address to a passerby. Brought home, he was put to bed but took eleven months to die, gradually weakening and often in great pain. Buffon, his earliest mentor, had described such an end in the previous century:

A very acute pain, if continued for a certain time, uniformly brings on either fainting or death. Our organs, which are endowed only with a certain degree of force, cannot resist more than a certain quantity of pain. If the pain becomes excessive, the organs are unable to support it; and, of course, they can transmit no intelligence of it to the mind, with which there is no correspondence but by distinct action of these organs. In this case, the action of the organs is interrupted, and consequently, all internal sensation is at an end.<sup>5</sup>

Did he have time and lucidity during his last terrible months to settle his affairs and dispose of his possessions? Or, at his death, did his wife, in her grief, dump the lot of them out in the fields of Halloy, seeing those dull and dusty rocks and fossils as agents of his death, or were they sold to private collectors, or did his grandsons salvage some for their own amusement, or did his son-in-law attempt to interest the Académie in Brussels in preserving them, or did they end up as paperweights



in his houses and as doorstops for his many doors?<sup>6</sup> No trace remains of them today, save a scrap of paper in an archive in Brussels, their exact nature, size, and importance lost, as were so many geological collections.

Often the sole traces are tiny hand-lettered tags, once fastened to specimens or affixed to compartments in cabinets, labels that told a tiny story of where each rock was found, of who had found it, of what its surroundings had been, and to which era it belonged (who, what, where, and when). Often the labels, and thus the stories too are lost, to dampness or as a result of moving collections from place to place. Perhaps his collections exist somewhere, unknown but intact. What difference would it make? The dusty rocks and dirty fossils had meaning to him, were markers of his travels and of his picture of the earth. It was his arrangement of them in his cabinet that gave them meaning, it was his picking them up off the ground that had brought them inside.

### Dragonflies

*I recognize the façade of course; I have seen many photos of it before. The family, it turns out, occupies the wing that once was the kitchen. A great stone fireplace, once the center of cooking and food preparation, dominates the living area. And the dining room for the guests of the house was probably the servants' dining room, or a room used for various food-related activities. The main part of the château, the center section, is basically a museum now, open at times to the public, who wander through the downstairs rooms, admiring the nineteenth-century furnishings, the collections of intricate porcelains, the tall windows, and the odd room fashioned like a Napoleonic tent.*

*Some of the family lives in the upstairs rooms, which are now under renovation, central heat and modern plumbing at last making their way into the château. The library is here, upstairs, under sheets of plastic and cloth, the books protected from the dust of the renovations. Everything looks as it must have looked more than a hundred years ago; a desk, a few statuettes, glass-fronted bookshelves that encircle the entire room. It is not a large room, but as you scan the titles on the book spines, you see real treasures of nineteenth-century erudition. Not only books but runs of periodicals, complete and nearly pristine. Of all the rooms in the château, this must be the only one that has not recorded any passage of time. An intact artifact of the nineteenth century.*

*The château is a weird amalgam of preserved museum space and actual living quarters. The youngest member of the family shows off a carved wooden case in the main room downstairs, part of the display for the public. It is the perfume case of her great-grandmother, still containing, she proudly shows, actual oils and scents in thick glass bottles, ready to be mixed, and a comb and a brush, still holding strands of hair. The young woman senses the presence of her ancestor in this object, and it is with obvious reverence that she handles the bottles and brush. Upstairs, in her bedroom, is an old fireplace over whose mantle is painted a rendition of the seventeenth-century château barely recognizable to modern eyes.*

*Other rooms are shown and everywhere the air is damp and almost cold. The hosts apologize and offer a sweater, but there is no need. Not until the tour exits the main house and begins to take in the extensive grounds does the cold begin to register. But the sight of the little bridge over a hidden stream and the Greek pavilion recognizable from the old photos makes me forget any physical discomfort. I have entered a kind of wonderland, where the past and present cohabit, and walk the ground that has been, for years now, a place found only in books, crunching gravel and dry leaves underfoot.*



**Michel-Edmond.** *Home is where the heart is.* For him, home was Longchamps in Waremme, an estate and a region he did not know until the age of three, when he rejoined his father in Belgium. His first years were spent in Paris with his mother while his father remained in Belgium, where he was Mayor of Liège during the First Empire. But it was Longchamps that obsessed him for the rest of his long life, either as a naturalist or as a politician; both were capacities he filled with great success. By the age of ten, he had collected its eggs and butterflies, by sixteen he had catalogued its birds, and by twenty-five he had already written a will to disperse his collections safely.<sup>7</sup> Home was the château, a neoclassical residence built in 1810 in the Louis XVI style, complete with a first-floor room that, in plaster and stone, recreated Napoleon's tent. Home was also the land, a huge park of streams and woods, field and pond, populated, by his calculation, with:

thirty-nine species of mammals  
one hundred and seventy-two species of birds  
eleven species of freshwater fish<sup>8</sup>

He would spend his life cataloguing, describing, drawing, stuffing, pinning, embalming, and drying the specimens of his native countryside, amassing a huge col-



lection, for which he had constructed a special building adjacent to the château, to house them all save the insects, which were deemed too fragile to withstand the cold winters and humid summers of the country house. They remained in the house in Liège. The insects were the most significant part of the collection, the dragonflies important enough that to this day they reside, separately inventoried and housed, in the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles in Brussels, one of the only collections there to remain intact and not dispersed into the great storage drawers, mixed with other specimens from other collections. Belgian fauna, in all its diversity, obsessed him, occupied him, and brought him the fame he enjoyed until his death at the dawn of the twentieth century, at the age of eighty-seven years.

Faune belge, 1<sup>re</sup> partie, indication méthodique des mammifères, oiseaux, reptiles et poissons observés jusqu'ici en Belgique, Author: Selys-Longchamps, Michel-Edmond, baron de, 1813–1900. Liège, H. Dessain; 1842. 310 p. 9 pl., diagsr. (1 fold.) 23 cm. Language: French. Subject(s): Zoology—Belgium.

Edmond had married, in 1838, the daughter of d'Omalius d'Hallo, Sophie-Caroline. One of his many journals sketches out his courtship:

1837	12 jan	Il revoit Sophie: son amour se rallume—15 nouvelle rupture étant engagé avec Pauline Bossange
	3 fevrier	parole engagée à Sophie, définitivement
	21 fevrier	accordailles: père favorable, mère et soeur hostiles <sup>9</sup>

His father-in-law was more of a spiritual father, sharing his intense preoccupation with the natural world. But where Jean-Julien had gathered the rocks of the earth and ordered them according to time, Edmond gathered the living creatures he encountered and ordered them according to space, the territory of Waremm outside Liège being his matrix. The objects of his interest were not so much souvenirs of a past as talismans of the present. His enterprise was more a true collection than Jean-Julien's, in that the origin, the narrative, had no function. Enumeration and classification replaced the desire to reconstruct a past. Time was thus domesticated,



even excluded from the space of the collection, as artifacts from a particular place filled up the cases, without regard to their story and with no desire to fill in the spaces between them.

His collections, perhaps more than most, incarnated the *Encyclopédie*'s vision of a natural history cabinet as an "*abregé de la nature entière*," for he attempted no less than the complete inventory of his native countryside.<sup>10</sup> He collected in the park at Longchamps, but he was able to amass a nearly complete series of finches and dragonflies because he also obtained specimens from far-flung correspondents and from his own travels. What nineteenth-century specimen collections, such as Edmond's, really amounted to were flattened series taken from three-dimensional nature. All the known species of finches in a region, all the bats common to a province, all known species of dragonflies in the world. If d'Omalius d'Halloy was a *stratigraphe*, a reader of rock strata, arranging the rocks in his cabinet in the same layers and order from which he had removed them, Edmond was also a *stratigraphe*, a reader of animal strata, the layers of the natural world that he carefully removed, preserved, and displayed.



He was much more as well. At the time of his death in 1900, he was a much-beloved politician who had served in the Belgian Senate for more than forty-five years, nine of them as its president. The throngs that filled the park at Longchamps on the occasion of a *manifestation en l'honneur de M. le Baron Edm. de Selys Longchamps* in 1897 were tangible proof of his celebrity and popularity. Unassuming, simple in his habits, he went to bed early every night and did not drink wine until the age of forty, and then only in moderation. The title of *baron* was something he ignored and avoided for most of his life, stipulating in his marriage contract to Sophie d'Omalius d'Hallooy that he would not use it. He left behind a vast correspondence and volumes of journals related to both his career as politician and as naturalist. Indeed, it is difficult to speak of his life, or of his father-in-law's, without creating a kind of dichotomy—man of science, man of state. He won renown equally in both arenas, but science must have been his true love. Duty called him into political service, and he fulfilled it with great devotion and success, but the study of nature was his passion.

Nineteenth-century collections of natural history specimens, that is, of formerly living creatures, were subject to many difficulties. Preservation techniques were unrefined and unpredictable, and what survives is not necessarily what was most carefully preserved. Soft tissue decayed and was lost. Teeth, bones, beaks, and shells lasted and remain. Fragile creatures like frogs and caterpillars could only be preserved in glass jars filled with alcohol, jars that were difficult to seal, so that evaporation occurred, and difficult to store. In addition, bloated floating specimens were not attractive drawing-room fare and did not make the transition to *bibelots* that their smaller brethren such as butterflies and seashells managed. Lighter creatures such as birds and insects were easier to dry and stuff, and thus preserve and display, in drawers, in boxes, or on shelves. But even with careful drying and stuffing, animal specimens underwent a transformation. Once removed from the natural world and preserved, they were *other*. The birds and small mammals surviving in the Selys (and other) collections have eyes of white cotton, vaguely ghostlike, and are missing bits and pieces of their anatomy, pieces that now rattle around in the large wooden specimen drawers, their unity lost and irretrievable.

Before entering a specimen room at the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles, you first turn on the interior lights, from outside in the hallway. The collections are carefully separated from the museum itself, in a different building linked by a common stairway and elevator shaft, a precaution against losing everything in case of fire. The rooms are thus dark and closed most of the time. When you enter, the smell is what you notice first, formaldehyde, the liquid that preserves the soft tissues in jars. Then aisles of floor-to-ceiling cabinets of drawers, each drawer as wide as your outstretched arms and covered with a glass lid, making them heavy and awkward to examine. There are rooms of insects and rooms of birds, rooms of small mammals and rooms of fish and reptiles. Some large specimens are standing in the aisles, staring at you as you move along the rows, tall birds on spindly legs and



beavers standing erect, gnawing a tree trunk. It is not a difficult task to find Edmond's specimens, since they have kept their original pink tags, labeled by him; it is a matter of scanning the drawers for bits of pink. However, the sheer number of specimens makes any retrieval a daunting task. Whole drawers of finches, parrots, bats; drawer after drawer, aisle after aisle, room after room, until it is hard to believe there is a living thing left in Belgium. This is what Edmond's collections are now; what they were was wholly different: a large wing of the château as a museum and workshop (3,189 specimens of birds alone), cases of insects in the great house in Liège, all the specimens carefully labeled and arranged in a methodical order, some series nearly complete enough to include every species in the world. Surrounded by a life's work in each of his residences, Edmond catalogued a natural world he saw disappearing before his eyes, as much of his later writing described the extinction of local species due to industrialization, increased agricultural production (soil depletion, overgrazing, chemical fertilizers, intense beet production), and the noise, smoke, and vibrations from the ever-expanding railroads. From his juvenile collections of eggs and butterflies (preserved as well at the *Institut*) to the collections of his final years, Edmond documented not only the state of his natural world but, unwittingly, its decay as well, introducing nostalgia into the interstices of the collection, absence into the inventory of artifacts.

### Glass

*A pile of archival boxes, wide and shallow cardboard containers. Some are labeled helpfully with general subjects, some simply labeled "A classer," or "Divers." I start with the first one, pick out a few photographs of interest from the pile inside. The second box and the third are gone through, and again a few more photos are chosen, but without any real idea of why or what purpose they will eventually serve. The pile shifts; the boxes are no longer in*

*the order they were when first encountered. I become confused as to which ones I have examined. I rearrange the boxes in my own order, to keep things straight in my mind. At last I see something, an image that strikes a chord in my memory, my own image. And suddenly the archive rearranges itself before my eyes, silently, without my lifting a finger. What I am looking for in all those boxes becomes known, detaches itself from the artificial order that has been imposed by some underpaid, bored museum intern. I begin to see echoes of my own life there. This archive of images can be ordered according to my own memory.*

*For the photographs are orphaned, these sometimes fading, sometimes crumbling, sometimes scorched images. We do not know names, of people or of places, and we do not know dates. The who and the where and the when are forgotten, the captions have been erased, lost. What is left is the category, as the box labels now attest.*

Châteaux  
Famille  
Paysans  
Église  
Constructions/ruines  
Liège  
Portraits—groupes  
Objets d'art  
Intérieures  
Animaux  
Parc

*With only a vague connection now to place or time, and almost none to names, the images here have been set adrift. They are free now, free of history. Houses, great and humble. Lakes and woods and ponds and streams. Funeral processions and weddings, costume parades and informal family gatherings, in parlors, on lawns, and on porches. The jumble of strangers and foreign landscapes can take on a familiar cast, one that is recognizable, and I begin to search out the images I know are there, somewhere. The images that live in memory but have been translated now into another language, transplanted into another century.*

**Raphaël.** *Old folks at home.* He inherited the château at Longchamps; as the eldest son it was his due. However, a rumor persists to this day that the two châteaux, Halloy and Longchamps, were divided between the brothers by a drawing of lots. At any rate, he would have shared it with his father until the latter's death, just as the château d'Halloy continued as well to be one of Edmond's residences during his lifetime. The château de Longchamps is a frequent subject of Raphaël's photographs, its façade eminently photogenic, with a main entrance nicely framed by a deep arched doorway and twin Ionic pillars, a short set of three steps providing a convenient staging for group portraits, most often pictures of his own large family.

He was not a scholar like his father and grandfather. He did not leave documents behind him, neither articles written for learned journals, monographs on





aspects of the natural world, nor detailed personal journals analyzing his own life. What he left were pictures, hundreds of them, prints on paper of varying thickness, size, and quality and glass negatives, many large pieces of glass, discovered toward the end of the twentieth century, stored away in an attic at the château at Longchamps, forgotten but intact. How he stored his photographs, what the “collection” looked like during his life, is a matter only of conjecture; in boxes, in albums, scattered about the château, in a dedicated darkroom, hidden, framed and displayed, carefully stored, or haphazardly thrown in drawers, we have no way of knowing. But they were somehow gathered up, the prints that is, and made their way from Longchamps to Brussels, intact as a collection, where they were found in a bookseller’s shop in 1986, bought and then moved, en masse, to the museum of photography in Charleroi, where they were eventually reunited with the newly uncovered glass negatives.

Propriétaire terrien fortuné, membre de l’Association belge de Photographie, Raphaël de Selys Longchamps (1841–1911) profite de ses longs temps de loisir pour s’adonner à sa passion. Portraits, scènes de genre, paysages nous font ainsi découvrir la chronique d’une grande famille de la région de Liège. Son oeuvre appartient à une époque charnière, celle qui voit la photographie se vulgariser, en se libérant de lourdes contraintes techniques. Raphaël de Selys Longchamps est une figure exemplaire de la pratique photographique en amateur pendant le dernier quart du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle.<sup>11</sup>

In 1839, a few weeks after Louis Daguerre demonstrated his new invention in Paris, photographs were being produced in Belgium. As it did throughout the world, photography flourished in Belgium, with professionals setting up portrait studios in major cities and amateur photographers roaming the countryside. By the time

Raphaël de Selys Longchamps, eldest son of Edmond, took up the art in 1875, the novelty may have worn off, but its practitioners were still mainly members of the upper classes; the price of the equipment was still quite high, and the necessary chemicals and cameras were still quite complex. Photographers in the late nineteenth century carried with them a veritable darkroom and lab as they moved about the countryside or city streets taking their pictures.

Raphaël took up photography probably because of the influence of one of his father's close friends. Much as his father and grandfather had served in scientific learned societies, Raphael involved himself in the newly formed Belgian Association for Photography in 1875 and served several times over the course of twenty-five years as its president and vice president. And, much as his father and grandfather had carefully collected and classified specimens of nature, especially specimens of their native countryside, Raphaël took picture after picture of his native landscape, its inhabitants, his family, his residences, and himself.

These photographs, like any photograph, are not so much interpretations of his world or even representations of a hidden aspect of his reality (as, for example, the rocks in his grandfather's collection seem to constitute a historical narrative) as they are merely pieces of that world, material pieces, objects from a particular time and place that bear the image of people and things and places long gone. He made no claim to expertise, nor did he concern himself with scholarly endeavors; abandoning any ambition of understanding or interpreting his world, he merely collected pieces of it by fabricating images.

His images contain within them a fundamental tension, the intimacy of the scenes he photographs colliding with the intrinsic reproducibility of the image itself. His photographs, highly personal artifacts of his reality, are at the same time material, even commercial, objects, objects that can be circulated, displayed, duplicated. There are other tensions inherent in the photograph.<sup>12</sup> By capturing a singular moment in time, a fleeting snapshot of the present, it fixes that singular, present moment for all eternity in an image. Whatever the camera lens "saw" when it opened, existed in that way for only that split second, before melting back into the flux of ordinary, lived reality. The figures on the porch of the château moved an instant after the shutter clicked, walked off toward the park, went back into the house, scratched their noses, woke up the sleeping dog who then barked and leaped and begged to be taken for a walk. But in the act of "seeing" the camera seized their image, fixed it in a chemical solution, and insured that it could be infinitely recreated on paper, thus rescuing it from time's passage (while all the other moments of that day are forever lost to us), but dooming it to be eternally past; a moment no sooner seized (or no sooner lived) than lost. So his photographs participate in the phenomenon that is time in the same way as did his father's stuffed specimens, each a pinned and forever-fixed material trace of a moment that cannot be pinned or fixed and so must forever haunt us with its passing. A unique image (moment) arrested in a repeatable object.



As his father collected organic pieces of the world, Raphaël collected its visual pieces, images on glass and paper. Fragmenting the unremitting flow of days, he broke his world into a series of separate units, into pictures that were not simply realistic reproductions but contained something of the reality he photographed; a material vestige of their subjects persists—traces, vestiges, and, at the same time, objects. His photographs are appropriations of his reality, a capturing of the present as it became the past, thin slices of space and time become objects, objects that can be held, collected, displayed, repeated, and mourned.

### **Paper**

*Even in October, the countryside was green. Fields had been harvested and were neatly raked into empty brown rows. Some held huge piles of beets, sugar beets, dug up and waiting for trucks to haul them to the refineries. More than one person had warned of the dangers of driving during beet harvest season. The roads are thick with them, they said, and slick as*



ice when they get wet. Road signs indicating slippery driving conditions were everywhere on the narrow country roads, but the summer had been dry and the threatened glissage did not really pose a risk. Trees all held onto their summer verdure, stubbornly refusing to give it up, and the grass too, and flowerbeds, in the city as well as in the villages I drove through, still offered up blooms of red and pink and yellow and violet. I had expected a dreary autumn of damp and cold, but this was a different version of summer.

I had slept the previous night at the old farm adjacent to the château, the Ferme de la Motte, a complex of ancient stone buildings surrounding a traditional basse-cour. The farmhouse, two stories tall, had rough stone walls without and a picture-perfect remodeled interior of white walls, blond wood floors, and glimpses of the original timbers peeking out of walls and ceilings, as if small areas of the new interior had worn away in spots, revealing traces of the past. The house was flanked by two wings of farm buildings, so that the basse-cour was enclosed on three sides. A cavernous stone barn, home to three pampered horses, joined the north end of the house and a smaller barn, formerly for sheep, joined the south end. The west end of the courtyard, where a cow barn had stood years ago, was now open, a mass of stones overgrown with grass and vines.

The morning was cool and fresh with some mist on the hills, and the grass was wet underfoot as we trudged up an overgrown path toward the cemetery. The château lay below, behind and to our left, unseen from the woods that led up the hill to the graves. My host, Marie, apologized for the damp, looking down at my impractical shoes and at her own sturdy rubber boots, but I brushed aside her concern. Don't worry, I told her, I'm fine. And so I was, trudging up a green hill overhung with trees and vines, the path just barely discernible through the years of undergrowth, toward the remains of Walter, the closest I would come to actually meeting one of them, the men whose objects had obsessed me for so long.

A little out of breath, I arrived at the summit, the top of a sloping meadow that fell away beneath us and spilled through the woods and onto the edge of the château grounds. Once, it had most likely been an actual field of something useful and cared for; Walter must have chosen the spot for its vantage point and for its remoteness from the buildings and people he had tended for so long. Joséphine had arrived there first, a year ahead of him, so he must have arranged

*for their last domicile then, at her death, and so knew where he too would end up, even as he left for Switzerland, alone, after her death—she who had been his companion through such a turbulent life together, la femme qui ne sourit jamais, as her descendants now called her. The woman who never smiled.*

*The monuments were great rectangular stones, slabs of granite, simply carved with names and dates. Curiously, they were horizontal monoliths, not upright at all, but lying flat and low to the ground, nearly camouflaged by their bucolic surroundings. Marie explained that Walter had had to obtain special permission to bury his wife there, to be buried there himself, outside of a cemetery, in open ground, as it were. Even in death, he would not conform, shunning the religiosity of a cemetery, the too-easy presumption of eternal life and salvation. They dwelt alone, as they always had to a certain extent, although they shared their last ground with descendants they never knew, grandsons and a great-granddaughter, also lying beneath great stone slabs, five silent observers of the quiet countryside they had inhabited, which now grew warmer and brighter as the morning sun climbed and the whistle of a passing train broke through the motionless air.*



**Walter.** *There's no place like home.* He was never meant to live a conventional life, although all the outward signs of a respectable nineteenth-century aristocratic existence are there. Degrees in law and science, further study in Paris, a voyage to

Brazil in pursuit of natural history specimens, marriage, a large family of educated children, political office, and the respect and affection of his countrymen; all this could be said of his father, of his grandfather. But he was a horse of a very different color. In family photographs taken by his brother, he is always standing apart, alone, isolated. This isolation, though, was willed, bought and paid for, by his actions, by his wife who followed him into exile, by his children who were raised in a most unconventional manner.

He left Belgium in 1875 with a woman not at all of his social class, the cook from the château de Longchamps. He lived in Paris and then Switzerland for seven years, during which time four of his children were born, three of them before he officially married their mother; his exile, self-imposed by his desire to protect his father's reputation. Much of his time and energy during those years of exile were taken up with the education of his children, which he undertook himself, distrustful as he was of conventional educational theory and of conventional ideas on religion and morality. Upon the death of his oldest daughter, a tragedy his grandfather and father had both known, he retired to Halloy, where he lived out his life in the country, a veritable Belgian Tolstoy, replete with peasant shirt, flowing beard, and eccentric lifestyle.



While installed at Halloy, the familial estate on his mother's side, he took possession of the great library and must also have taken possession of and continued the odd collection he found there, a collection begun by his grandfather in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Publishing prospectuses from France and Belgium. Author(s): J. d' Omalius d'Halloy; Walter de Sélys-Longchamps. 1811–1909. Language: French. 1396 items.

Prospectuses for monographs and serials, catalogs of publishers and book-sellers, subscription solicitations for serials, and miscellaneous items issued chiefly in France and Belgium during the nineteenth century. Also includes materials from Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland.

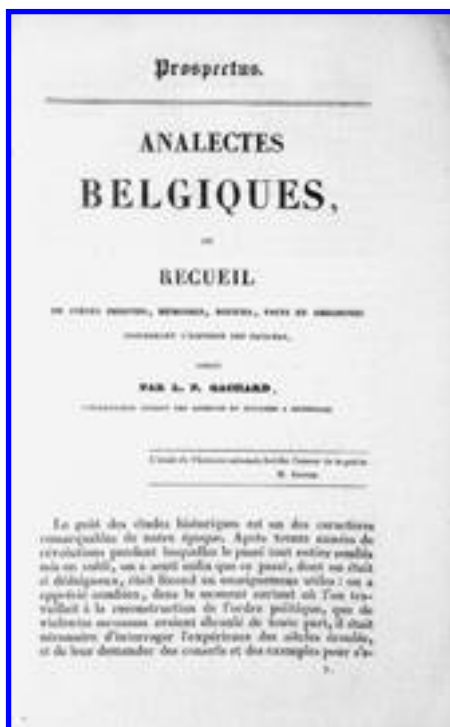
Cite as: Archive of French Publishing Prospectuses Collection (Library of Congress).

Provenance: Collection begun by Belgian geologist Jean-Julien d'Omalus d'Halloy and continued by his grandson Walter de Sélys-Longchamps./ Source: Purchase from William Reese Company, Aug. 15, 1990.<sup>13</sup>

Walter de Sélys Longchamps (his name is sometimes spelled *Walther*) was the younger brother of Raphaël, youngest son of Edmond. Raised at the château at Longchamps and in Liège by a father who instilled in him the republican ideals he had inherited from his own father, and who, by his example, taught him the value of scholarship, inquiry, and duty, Walter became a very different man than either his father or his brother, who received a similar upbringing. At what point, and why, did his life and beliefs leave the path of respectable upper-class morality and embrace a stubborn, atheistic, anticonformist dogma? He left behind scattered documents that attest to this dogma, but no clue as to the cause for his radical deviation from the conventional life his father and brother led. The marriage contract he drew up and signed at his union with a woman who had already born him three children, attests to his absolute abhorrence of the institution (*un véritable esclavage*), and to his view of marital fidelity as “degrading and immoral.” This was not an ordinary late-nineteenth-century man.

On the other hand, the collection now associated with his name holds nothing but the most ordinary of objects, publishers’ catalogues and notices of books about to be published, just published, or on sale at the time. Called “prospectuses,” these are, for the most part, simply advertisements for books and reviews, although there are a few prospectuses properly speaking. The solicitation of subscribers who would pay for a book before publication and receive either a discounted price or the inclusion of their name in the final printed product was a common practice from the very earliest years of printing, used if the publication was a risky financial undertaking. Some of the books represented in the collection, then, never saw the light of day and exist only virtually, as prospectuses. Printed pamphlets such as these were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, as publishing took off over the course of the century, increasing in numbers and kind due to the mechanization of all the processes of book production as well as to the dramatic growth in the number and demographics of readers, resulting, at century’s end, in what was called “a crisis of over-production.” The remarkable thing about this collection is not what is in it, but the fact that it was undertaken at all. And it is likely that it was very carefully and consciously assembled and stored. From the beginning of his stewardship of the library at Halloy, d’Omalus had kept detailed lists and records. Starting in *l’an 10* (1802), he recorded his book and periodical purchases year by year. He sketched





the entire library on a long sheet of paper, showing the arrangement of shelves, furniture, and doors. There are several versions of his *Base de classement de mes livres*, a kind of guide to the classification and arrangement of the library. This was a man who carefully formed and cared for his library. The collection of publishers' catalogues and announcements seems an organic part of this enterprise.

Begun in the margins, then, of the great library at Halloy, the prospectus collection was added to and maintained over the course of the nineteenth century; the first item dates from 1811 and the last from 1909, a few years before Walter's death. The library itself passed to Walter when he took possession of the château d'Halloy and remained associated with him after his death, as it was sold at auction over the course of the twentieth century, the first major sale in 1928:

Bibliothèque du Baron Walter de Selys Longchamps (1846–1912), comprenant les Bibliothèques complètes du Géologue J.-J. d'Omalus d'Halloy (1783–1875) et du Zoologiste Edm. de Selys Longchamps (1813–1900), nombreux ouvrages et périodiques rares et précieux dont la vente publique aura lieu les Lundi 27, Mardi 28 et Mercredi 29 Février 1928. Galerie Fievez 6, rue Montagne-de-L'Oratoire, Bruxelles.<sup>14</sup>

Another great sale took place in 1936, and smaller ones in 1970 and 1972, the library at Halloy suffering the fate of nearly all nineteenth-century private libraries:

dispersal at the death of an owner.<sup>15</sup> It exists now only as a wing of the château empty of books, as items in sale catalogues, and as a few scattered volumes that still belong to various family members. What's left? A miniaturization of that once-great collection, in the form of pamphlets, a material trace of a collection that *is* no longer, a thin, papery echo of a library.

For which books do we now have the prospectus or catalogue? For the books that were purchased? Or for the books that were not? Were the catalogues and prospectuses a means of containing the frenzy of book production by carefully keeping a fragment of books that could not be owned, would not fit in the finite space of the library? Or were they kept as a kind of record of book production itself, whether or not the books were actually purchased for the library—a way to document the filling up of printed space? Thousands of pamphlets could fit into the space of a few boxes, whereas the books themselves would fill vast halls. The diminutive “versions” of books rendered the unbridled and chaotic printed world possessable, manageable. Without the library for comparison, the prospectuses and catalogues become a synecdoche of a now-vanished collection, small pieces that must now stand in for an absent whole.

And yet they are, in and of themselves, a collection, whose meaning and value perhaps has yet to be established. Of all the Selys collections, the prospectuses are the most carefully preserved and housed, the most meticulously catalogued, and the most accessible by means of digital technology. A record in an online database and a stand-alone database in the Library of Congress, this collection is described and findable on the Internet and infinitely manipulatable by digital tools. Although the items, physically housed in acid-free folders, are arranged alphabetically by name of publisher, some of the information has also been entered into a database that allows for the rearrangement of the objects in any order whatsoever, for the selection and elimination of parts of the collection, and for the possibility of various modes of display, so that the collection can be remade over and over again. If this collection was once amassed in order to somehow tame the chaos of the library, that role was lost when the library was dispersed. If it was maintained in order to contain the Babel of printed production, that function was infinite and impossible to fulfill. While it exists now in a physical arrangement and occupies a specific space, it has, in effect, been released from any materiality and set free to reconstitute itself.

## Epilogue

*For we collect at those places where we, for whatever reason, are connected to the world.*

There is movement here, a progression of sorts. It is not simply the weight of the objects that decreases as the century wears on: rocks to animals to glass to paper. Spatially, too, the collections contract. From the four dimensions of a geology col-



lection (three-dimensional rocks, embedded with the added dimension of time), to the three dimensions of natural history specimens and their cabinet, to the two dimensions of printed photographs and paper, the collections shed spatial layers while they lose narrative weight.

But if you look closely at what has been lost and what has been preserved, it becomes almost a question of *name*, or more precisely, *patronym*. The château d'Halloy, sold in the 1970s, is inhabited now by strangers to the family, the descendants of its original owners now occupy only the adjoining tenant farm. The library of the château d'Halloy, sold over the course of the twentieth century in a series of auctions, is completely dispersed save a few volumes in the possession of a handful of the far-flung descendants and odd books surfacing now and again in the bookshops of the town of Redu. The geological collection of the château d'Halloy is lost too, dispersed to an unknown fate, just as the once sterling reputation of its collector and owner has been dispersed over the decades of the nineteenth century, until the name disappears and the man is virtually unknown. He was an only child, producing only daughters, whose grandsons did not bear his name. His château passed to his son-in-law, whereupon it became a possession of a new family.

The château, the library, the collections of the Selys Longchamps family did not suffer such a fate. All are essentially intact. The château is undergoing a meticulous renovation at the hands of a great-great granddaughter who inhabits it; the books occupy the shelves of the château's library where their original owner placed them;

the collections of two generations are preserved in Brussels, in Charleroi, in Washington.

What of the men themselves, the “collectors”? Is there a bond beyond the very real one of blood and the very arbitrary linking of their collections? The correspondence they left behind shows a genuine affection of one for the other. Raphaël wrote newsy, affectionate letters to Walter in his Parisian exile, as did Edmond. Walter in turn wrote warmly to his father, not apologizing outright for the difficult situation in which he had placed him, but expressing a real love and gratitude for a man who had let his youngest son follow his own path, no matter how detrimental it was to him personally. Edmond’s journals mention his father-in-law quite frequently, referring to visits by *M. d’Omalius* and his wife at the château de Longchamps. One senses a respect and a love for the man.

Geographically, the family is linked by the names of towns and cities. Beginning with *Paris*, where d’Omalius, Edmond, and Walter studied natural history at the *Muséum*. To *Brussels*, where d’Omalius, Edmond, and Walter served the Belgian Senate, and where Raphaël attended military school. To *Liège*, where the Selyses kept a residence on Boulevard de la Sauvenière, and *Namur*, where the town erected a statue in honor of its own d’Omalius. To the tiny village of *Halloy*, which today is no more than a cluster of stone buildings on the road to the larger town of Ciney, where d’Omalius lived most of his life and where Walter lived out his life after his return from Paris and Switzerland. To *Waremme*, the seat of the Selys Longchamps family since the seventeenth century and site of the château. And in between? The meanderings of d’Omalius over Europe, the scientific journey to Brazil of Walter, the shorter trips of Edmond to cities in Europe where he spoke of his work in natural history, the houses in Paris and Switzerland where Walter spent his self-imposed exile. But the peregrinations seem to collapse onto the triangle of *Liège-Halloy-Waremme*, the countryside of central Belgium, the place where each of these men returned again and again, and where they now rest.

It was in the archives at the University of Liège, in a room within the library where the rare books are housed on open ancient wooden shelves encircling a long wooden table, that I found the link I could not have known existed. A pile of boxes had been brought there, and each was stuffed with papers. (The librarian said they had literally shoveled the papers out of the château d’Halloy several years before, when the owner wished to be rid of it all). There was a rough list of what the boxes held, but in effect, I could only wade through the papers, pulling this one out and then that one, never sure exactly what I was looking for, nor what I would find.

One of the astonishing documents was a thirty-odd-page pamphlet, in crabbed nineteenth-century handwriting, a diary of the life and last months of Marguerite de Selys Longchamps, the four-year-old daughter of Edmond, who died in May 1852 (“Tu es née, en février 48 avec la jeune République notre espoir; tu as reçu de la même vie qu’elle”), apparently of meningitis. The emotion that pours out of

this account, written one year after her death by a still-grieving father, is almost shocking. One is caught offguard by such searing details of the medical interventions (leeches and blood-letting), of the child's physical suffering (vomiting and hallucinations), or of the father's intense pain.

C'est là, au milieu de la chambre, en face de la cheminée, que la pauvre enfant a rendu son âme à Dieu à 3 heures 40 minutes de relevée, au moment où je sentais son poulx défaillir entre mes mains comme une montre qui va s'arrêter et que j'inondais sa joue de mes larmes après l'avoir embrasser une demi-minute avant la fatale séparation, et avoir baisé trois fois sa pauvre petite main encore chaude.

History is never this personal, this visceral. That a person, who in official accounts is always portrayed as a man of science and a serious politician, would record this tragedy in such exquisite and personal detail is quite breath-taking.

Then I find the letters exchanged between father and son, between brothers, and Edmond's scribbled journal entries. And I read the passages Walter copied from the writings of various nineteenth-century philosophers and social historians, reflecting his own idiosyncratic beliefs and values. The pieces of a puzzle begin to fall together.

Dates do not make sense, dates of marriage and birth. The official family genealogy from the august *Annuaire de la noblesse belge* lists Walter's marriage as taking place in 1871, however here are letters to his father written in his hand, discussing his marriage, dated 1881. And not only discussing the details of the ceremony but also clearly showing his state of mind, his absolute hatred of the institution, documenting that he in fact never married the mother of his two children. The official record has been altered to spare Edmond's reputation, to legitimize the children, one of whom went on to become an eminent scientist in his own right, to cover up the fact that a prominent member of the Belgian aristocracy thumbed his nose at convention and lived with a woman for years, outside the bounds of polite society. It is a small deception, perpetrated on subsequent generations of researchers, but it is a telling one. One cannot rely on official documents. There is no way to be certain of the record of history.

One last thing. An envelope preserved, a letter from Walter to his father, Edmond ("au revoir mon cher Père, je vous embrasse tous bien tendrement, en vous demandant bien pardon de tous les chagrins que je vous cause à mon grand regret") dated May 1881, with a return address of

2, rue de la Tour, Passy

I pause and reread it. Passy, rue de la Tour, the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris, the place I called home for a year, so many years ago. I passed that building every day, several times a day, en route to my studio apartment two blocks away. Walter and I had been neighbors, had inhabited the same space at different times. It had



seemed for so long as if this had begun in Washington, in the cage on Deck B, Jefferson Building, the Library of Congress. But it had really started, imperceptibly, unknowingly, all those years ago in Paris.

## Notes

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1. Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, “Epoques de la nature,” in *Oeuvres Choisies de Buffon* (Paris, 1883), 64.
2. “Physicists, chemists, and mathematicians, taking note of all the nomenclatural inconsistencies—of time named for mountain ranges, time named for savage tribes, time named for a country here, a country there, an oblast in the Urals—have politely, gently suggested that, in this one sense only, the time scale seems archaic, seems, if one may say so, out of date. Geology might be better served by a straightforward system of numbers. The reaction of geologists, by and large, has been to look upon this suggestion as if it had come over a bridge that exists between two cultures. A Continental geologist, in 1822, named seventy-six million years for the white cliffs of Dover, for the downs of Kent and Sussex, for the chalky ground of Cognac and Champagne. Related strata were spread out through Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Poland. He called it *Le Terrain Crétacé*. If that name was apt, his own was irresistible. He was J.J. d’Omalius d’Halloy. Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous”; John McPhee, *Basin and Range* (New York, 1981), 117.
3. “At the end of the day they were panting under the weight of their specimens, but courageously bore them back home. They placed them along the steps, on the staircase, in

the bedroom, the dining room, the kitchen, and Germaine bewailed the amount of dust they made.

It was no light task, before sticking on the labels, to discover the names of the rocks. The diversity of color and graining made them confuse clay with marl, granite with gneiss, quartz with limestone.

Also, the names vexed them. Why Devonian, Cambrian, Jurassic, as if the soils denoted by these words existed only in Devon, in Wales and in the Jura. It was impossible to know one's way. What is a system for one is a stage for another; for a third merely an assize. The beds are lost in confusion; but Omalius d'Halloy warns you not to believe in geological classification.

This statement relieved them"; Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, trans. T. W. Earp and G. W. Stonier (Norfolk, Conn., 1954), 103–4.

4. J.J. d'Omalius d'Halloy, "Observations on a Sketch of a Geological Map of France, the Pays-Bas, and Neighbouring Countries," in *A Selection of the Geological Memoirs in the Annales des Mines*, trans. Henry De La Beche (London, 1824), 295.
5. Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular by the Count de Buffon*, trans. William Smellie (London, 1791), 2:491.
6. "A fossil fish type had been blackened and used as a doorstop, but is now cleaned and in the British Museum.' This is reminiscent of a record about the handsome type-specimen of the Giant Club-Moss (*Lepidodendron*), which, as the late Dr. T. S. Hall relates, was doing duty for some time as a doorstop in a Carlton Shop"; Fred K. Chapman, "Scientific Collections: Their Romance and Tragedy," *The Victorian Naturalist* 58 (1942): 160–62.
7. "Ma mère fera construire près de la station du chemin de fer à Waremmes un Musée suffisant pour y rassembler toutes les productions de la Faune Belge avec un terrain alentour suffisant pour pouvoir l'agrandir. Ainsi qu'un jardin de plantes de pleines terre seulement . . . on rendra la ville de Waremmes propriétaire de ce musée dont mes collections feront le premier fonds"; unpublished will of Michel-Edmond de Selys Longchamps, 1838, folder 2640, Archives de l'État, Liège.
8. Michel-Edmond, baron de Selys Longchamps, *Collections zoologiques du Baron Edm. de Selys Longchamps, Catalogue systématique et descriptif, Fasc. XXXI, Oiseaux*. (Brussels, 1910), 18.
9. Unpublished notebook by Michel-Edmond de Selys Longchamps, box 342(?), Archives d'Halloy, Université de Liège.
10. "Le mot *cabinet* doit être pris ici dans une acception bien différente de l'ordinaire, puisqu'un *cabinet d'Histoire naturelle* est ordinairement composé de plusieurs pièces & ne peut être trop étendu; la plus grande salle ou plutôt le plus grand appartement, ne seroit pas un espace trop grand pour contenir des collections en tout genre des différentes productions de la nature: en effet, quel immense & merveilleux assemblage! comment même se faire une idée juste du spectacle que nous présenteroient toutes les sortes d'animaux, de végétaux, & de minéraux, si elles étoient rassemblées dans un même lieu, & vûes, pour ainsi dire, d'un coup d'oeil? ce tableau varié par des nuances à l'infini, ne peut être rendu par aucune autre expression, que par les objets mêmes dont il est composé: un *cabinet d'Histoire naturelle* est donc un abrégé de la nature entière"; *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres* (Paris, 1751), 2:489.
11. Marc Vausort, preface to Christine De Naeyer, *Raphaël de Selys Longchamps: un photographe amateur au XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (Charleroi, 1999), 5.
12. "Poetry and progress are two ambitious men who hate each other with an instinctive



hatred, and when they meet along the same road, one of them must give way. If photography is allowed to supplement art in some of its functions, it will soon have supplanted or corrupted it altogether, thanks to the stupidity of the multitude which is its natural ally. It is time, then, for it to return to its true duty, which is to be the servant of the sciences and arts—but the very humble servant, like printing or shorthand, which have neither created nor supplemented literature. Let it hasten to enrich the tourist's album and restore to his eye the precision which his memory may lack; let it adorn the naturalist's library, and enlarge microscopic animals; let it even provide information to corroborate the astronomer's hypotheses. In short, let it be the secretary and clerk of whoever needs absolute factual exactitude in his profession—up to that point nothing could be better. Let it rescue from oblivion those tumbling ruins, those books, prints, and manuscripts which time is devouring, precious things whose form is dissolving and which demand a place in the archives of our memory—it will be thanked and applauded. But if it be allowed to encroach upon the domain of the impalpable and the imaginary, upon anything whose value depends solely upon the addition of something of a man's soul, then it will be so much the worse for us!" Charles Baudelaire, "Le public moderne et la photographie," in *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1951), 763; trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 692.

13. Catalogue record from the *Library of Congress Online Catalog*.
14. Galerie Fievez, *Bibliothèque du Baron Walter de Selys Longchamps* (Brussels, 1927).
15. "Quelques temps, j'eus une illusion; j'espérais que cette belle bibliothèque, véritable monument de la science, resterait intacte; un établissement public, quelqu'ami ou protecteur éclairé des lettres, pouvait conserver cette collection précieuse et continuer l'oeuvre du savant que nous regrettons. Cette illusion s'est évanouie; tous ces beaux livres sont destinés à être dispersés. Triste résultat d'une époque où les uns ne peuvent, pensent-ils, faire des sacrifices pour des choses sérieuses, oubliant qu'ils gaspillent leur superflu en inutilités et en dépenses regrettables; où les autres laissent passer par indifférence, des occasions inespérées. Dans quelque temps il restera de mon savant ami et confrère ses travaux personnels qui marquent un grand pas dans la science, le souvenir de ses libéralités et le catalogue de cette belle bibliothèque qui servit à son oeuvre scientifique"; A. de Barthélemy, preface to *Catalogue des livres composant la bibliothèque d'histoire ancienne et d'archéologie de feu M. le baron de Witte* (Paris, 1891).

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